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Jane Adan

## Crooks, Chinks in the Day

In third grade, on those days that Susan was home sick, or maybe just pretending, not wanting to go to school, wanting to stay home instead, home being the other place there was, and though it wasn't always very nice there, at Susan's house, her dad making her mom cry, staying out after work, ignoring her and everything, so that she would get all stirred up and be really sad after he would call, lying there in the bedroom, not closing the door, forgetting we could see, or maybe wanting us to see, or someone, wanting someone to see, know something of how it was, or realizing, realizing that it didn't matter, that we would know what was going on whether we saw or not, as she had, at our age, and so leaving it open, the door, nothing mattering, her, us, that we were children, or not even thinking about it, the girls in the hall, their big ears, eyes, offspring of woodiness, talk, little beads of sweat appearing out of nowhere, nerves, I guess you could call it, or looking forward, into things. Or backward. Looking backward. Or both ways. Looking, anyway, at something, somewhere, and sweat, sweat appearing—

Take that, smack, smack, blows, kisses, string them out, make a necklace, choker beads, pearls, they have them down there, at Henley's,

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next to the pharmacy, already strung, earrings to match, attached to those little squares of cardboard to make a set, the last minute driving home he thinks of it, you can see it in his face, something, buy her a little something, to make up for, for everything, pulling in off the road, the row of parking spaces, out the door, slam it, through the door, me, there, holding it, the interior of the five and ten, teeming with ideas, possibility gone awry, mom and pop behind the counter, no kids but just the inventory filling up the shelves, racks, cases, the woman there, the Mrs., Mrs. H., she sees me come in, a familiar face, and she wants to buy the pin I'm wearing, I collect Mexican silver, she says, looking at the pin on my coat as I pay at the counter, cat eyes for taking to school, playing marbles, trading, and some of those little rubber babies that you see on shower cakes or can just play with, if you want to, from Mexico, she adds, as if I don't understand what she's getting at, asking, we vacation there, she says, my husband and I, talking on about the pin, about how it would fit right in with the other stuff in her collection, about how she would take good care of it, keep it polished, my pin.

My pin I think, touching it, wondering where she keeps her collection, how big it is, what sort of things are in it, looking at her, at Mrs. Henley, for some sign, nothing there, no jewelry anywhere on her person, but just the request filling up her mouth, the space it has opened, silence hanging there, her eyes, worlds in them, desire, my turn to speak, say something—

Why did I wear it, I think to myself, the pin, the pin is a pitcher, my grandmother bringing it back with her from Mexico City and giving it to me, one of her trips there, the time she caught the sailfish in the Gulf, had her picture taken on the dock afterward, standing there beside the scaffold on which the fish had been hoisted, taller than she was, the fish, that white blouse of hers, sandals, pants rolled up, city at her back, hills, a fellow fisherman to the left, along with a second fish, a third, all of them big, bigger than people, each in the other's picture, can you believe it? her friends say, when she has the film developed, shows the picture to them, that Helen! or Hellie, Hellie they would call her, some of them, sometimes, can you believe it? that Hellie! traveling the globe! fishing in the Gulf! Grandma and her fish to me, don't forget to stand up straight, she would say, mind your manners, and then away she would go, alone, all alone, returning with gifts, stories, photographs, what legs she did have, those calves of hers, conversation pieces, heels, spikes to set them off for the work week, give her that smart look, forever on the ball, going places, looks of approval, compliments from strangers, whistles on the street, from

across it, some guy in the crowd scanning legs, keeping track, noting new arrivals, additions, Mr. Map Maker, controller of the state of things, seeking to plot the world, arrange every piece in the mind—

The walk of women, how they do go, doing it, whatever it is that they do, moving, moving, into things, spaces, through doors, some of them, crooks, chinks in the day, walls, through them, the roof, attic, skipping out, disappearing, disappearing, women disappearing—

Don't forget to take your coat when you go, button up, honey, watch your step, take care, not to fall, be late, the way you have to leap up, scurry for the door, the things you leave behind, trammel, when you oversleep, cling to the sheets, tie knots to the bed post, string things together, make a rope, hobble, wobble, drop yourself over, feel the rope grip the air, bounce, straighten up, out—hey, girl, can we, can we, give you a lift, drop you, somewhere, a voice says, as you touch down, cut the cord—

Before your eyes it happens, or behind them, the life there, you wake up, catch a glimpse, a glimpse of something, first thing, before you blink, open your eyes, the glimpse gone, if you do that, open your eyes, though of course you want to, open your eyes, or you have to, or you do it, just do it, open your eyes, a reflex, we say, day entering, tying up the mind, implanting itself, the pupil enlarging, a pregnancy, cells filling up, dividing, nuclei giving orders, replicating things, the disaster of rising, being taken by day, and so you try to think what to do, teach yourself, to catch yourself, stop the lid, let the glimpse grow, show you things, deserted houses, dry wall, plaster falling away, archeologists, teams of science guys, mad cappers, screw balls, creating those little heaps, rubble, visitors, beetles, mice, rabbits, fields springing up at the door, through the floor, ghosts, witnesses, skylarking everywhere, commentaries on possession, dispossession, anchor men, editors—

Those women, you know the ones, oh, but you do, if only you would stop it, stop the pretending, watch them, how they dress, go, fur at the neck, at the pelt, hair, bikini lines, little prickles, irritation, furrows at the brow line, finger prints, in the closet, on the wall, carpet, pin her there, up against, down, take your time, read her rights, read her lefts, start wherever, it doesn't matter, run your finger, index the body parts, have you ever seen such skin, peaches and cream people tell her, measures to keep the sun off, eat fruits and vegetables, moisturizer every night, just before you knock off, long days on the punch card, the season heating up, fruits and vegetables conveyed as you stand there, truckers shifting gears, Monterey, San Joaquin, crates piling up, inspections, rejections, help yourself, the boss says, at the



end of the day, no one caring, missing them, the bounty of industry, set the alarm, rise—

Katherine, Grandmother Kate, so admiring of fairness, putting it out there, the hook of her face, the cream of it, sweetness, surviving sometimes on that alone, or so she would tell us, the lean years, the lengths to which she'd been driven, or so she would tell us, my mother such a dark lady, brown as a berry when the sun shone, what a shame Kate would cluck, giving Mom the once over, offering condolences, the bad luck of it, to come from the right side of things and yet look as she did, who are your people, people would say, summer visitors, in the early days, when they saw her, the young girl, given over, given over to everything, picnics, raillery, bare legs, hopefulness, where had it come from, this magical capacity to tan—

Touching her own cheek, Kate, a love pat, the careful makeup, swipes of tissue for blotting away any excess, the mirror there above the dressing table, a compact zippered into the purse, fingers retrieving it, snap it open, close it, the motion so resourceful, adept—

Where had it come from, the way Kate had of tending to her face, anywhere, anytime, little recesses, life scenes, stages carved out from the thick of things, portraits multiplying as the hands struck, making hay, reaping things, jewelry, husbands, nights on the town—

Lookers looking, all of them, stung in the quick of living through the wood, spirited, screw ups, stupid, a creature there, beckoning, the eyes crossed, drool, uh, uh, the catch of him, frog face, wolf man, the matter of the door, the passage between, whether to handle it, not handle it, open, close, cross over, make a change in your life, get yourself a habit, degree, convents, universities, the secretarial school on the hill, learn to blow a horn, why don't you, get yourself adopted, maybe take an option, learn to carry water, model, fill a bottle, form, be a Gunga, if you can, know how, see the light, make a din, black your face, white it out, take your meds, call the doctor, be a helper, lend a hand, ride the troop train to work, kick sand for the government, the good of commerce, enterprise, sign your name, shake hands, be an agent, make contracts, make babies, find treasure, dig it up, cash it in, her, him, hitch your wagon, dress the stars, be a fan, fan out, swing clubs, fence things, ride a cart, pony, build a mansion, live there, plant a lawn, have parties, collect swords, private lessons, tommies, crazy little women, stacked decks, legionnaires, little girls, boys, men, orphaned brothers, blood, Gary in that hat of his, Cary, those little flaps, elastic bands, Shirley in her tap shoes, tap, tap, jangle, jangle, Judy in her wide eyes, bosom strapped, keep it flat, body carved, soup, pills, little girl, nothing more, people watching,

pounds dropping, Sylvie waiting for the au pair, someone to look after things, Annie in her slow boat, rowing, rowing, never there, Angel Baby hitched to game shows, Astral on the doorstep, Morris there, Louise, baby popping out, another mother croaking on the big screen (and ain't it so, so, poignant)—drop to your knees you dummy, can't you see where you are—

Susan's mother lying there in the bedroom, taken up, as she was, with just the one thing, her face in the pillow, sealing itself into the space of the thing that could never happen, not to her, but that was happening anyway, everywhere, everyday, wanting him to be there, craving him, the husband, man in the picture, outside the house, refusing to come in, disappear, restraining orders the joke of another day, and besides, he wasn't violent, Susan's dad, Glen, Glen Alan, Mr. Bascomb, and though he didn't seem very nice to me, Susan liking him, though, or seeming to, or maybe trying to, or just not thinking about it, knowing better than to think about it—

One of those dopey dads, he was, that can make their kids wish for things, car accidents, funerals, cracked, he could have been, for all I knew, a big man, 6', employed by the forest service, to keep things civil, in check, balanced, I don't know what he did there, on the job, released fingerlings into rivulets, maybe, he could have done that, or lakes, lakes, too, letting them go, dumping them, buckets, vats, tanks, finned bodies, planters into water, wild lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, reservoirs of utility, near the shore, in the middle, riding out there to take a look, scout the birthright of fishermen, fish, rowing himself, others, using motors, pull the rope, off they go, the men of the Service, guardians of summer sport, making the skin creep along, the things Susan would say in those moments before we would fall asleep, not knowing, later, whether I had heard them or not, the idylls of the brain, recess of tissue, the kind of dad, he was the kind of dad you can't understand why anyone would want to marry him, his wife, his daughter, the girl across the street, slips of them everywhere, little bits of girl, shapes come a long way, and yet there he was, married, and with Susan and me playing away at our games while her mother cried, my mother maybe on her way to pick me up, dinner in the oven as she drove, Grandma home from work, keeping an eye on things, the cooking food, Dad there too, in the living room, or maybe the garage, just arrived, yes, and with him the car, Mom driving over in it, or maybe using Grandma's, if Dad was late, on those days, school days, the days when Susan stayed at home, sick, or maybe just pretending, after the morning recess bell had rung, and after I had put my papers and my pencil inside my desk, I would head quietly for the



door, the world out there, on the other side, the school, it was still the school, but not the room, the children a stream, streaming out, many streams, each through a different door, a whole row of them, doors, children streaming out to play.

On cold days, December days, winter, fall, early spring, that time of year, I would stop at the long wooden rack at the back of the classroom and take down my coat, and when I did this, took my coat down, I would do it with a particular kind of motion, different from other kinds, other ways of taking down a coat, sweeping, no hesitancy, and then I would put my coat on in the very same kind of way, the same motion informing my action, or something, something informing it, the move of me, making it what it was, hand, shoulder, arm sweeping themselves along, the others following, doing the same, through the sleeves they would go, extremities, ligaments, digits, first the one side, then the other, in this very assured way, assured, I was assured, an assurance, it was an assurance, it must have been generated from somewhere, somehow, I mean I was doing it, wasn't I, taking the coat down, moving myself into it in just such a way, a development, it was a development, of something, me, I don't know, learned, acquired, it was that, I guess, too, maybe, do you think, and a deception, it was a deception, deceitful, I was deceitful, had learned how to be this, or maybe simply known it, known it all along, broken it out from the wrapper when the right occasion came along, cellular matter taking things into her own hands, protection, survival, and at the same time that I would do it, put my coat on, as part of the action, and yet in some way not the same at all, I would pull my hair free, if it had happened to get caught inside my coat, the cloth tugging away at it as I started for the door, creating that feeling of being jerked back, held, my hands sweeping the hair to the outside, setting the legs free to move along.

Leaving the classroom—and you had to leave, you couldn't stay inside, not during recess, recess being the time of the teacher's disappearance, her removal, and also the time when children just did go outside, to play—I would walk briskly out onto the blacktop, as if recess were my favorite part of school, as if I had plans, a meeting place previously agreed upon, friends from another class.

Stepping off the paved strip of pathway onto the square filled with children, I did not, however, meet up with anyone, get absorbed in anything, but continued simply to walk. Not the same brisk walking as before, I don't mean that, but a new kind of walking, steady, the profile kept very low, rarely interrupted, except perhaps by another child, and by my occasional checks on the yard duty teacher, her whereabouts, placement of attention, whether she was scanning the

play yard or perhaps had her hands full, settling a dispute, handing down a ruling, or maybe just talking in a social kind of way to the handful of children who were always turning up wherever she was, near the drinking fountain, between the tether ball poles, at the mouth of the path that had emptied us into the yard.

Authority in her very step, little signs springing up, marking her, the job she'd been given, kindness sometimes there, too, in the eye, a dreadful sight, the prospect of good works beaming out from her, she was, I knew, quite capable of spotting a lone child, bearing down on her, tagging a shoulder, saying a name, familiar, the line she would take, the things she would say, steering the body, inserting it, question-less, into one of the playground games; space, time marked off in space, time, circles, squares, sides, lines, courts, welcoming you, white paint, chalk, issuing orders, directing feet, giving them a place to go, things to do.

There really was nothing to do without Susan, no more way, none that I could then think of, to pass the long minutes of that first recess with any sense of pleasure, release, than there would be later in the day, at noon, after eating lunch at the long row of pull down tables in the cafeteria, or, again, in the afternoon, during the last recess of the day, no way, I mean, that would not have bumped up against the school's sense of itself, made it jumpy, restless, ready to speak to the problem, shore itself up.

The other children mostly liked the playground games, or enough of them did, or seemed to, or played them as if they did, things going along okay, no real trouble, that it seemed as if nothing else could be made to happen, nothing different, I mean, from what was already present in the heart of the school, a way of thinking that would have made it possible, to begin with, just to begin with, for a person to be alone, some of the time, just some of the time, without the school wanting to put you somewhere else, or without it assuming, right away, as soon as it saw you, that what you really wanted, or needed, at the very least, needed, was to be with the other kids, doing whatever it was they were doing—a way of thinking, I mean, that would have allowed you to stretch yourself out, escape the reach of the asphalt, whether or not anyone else wanted to, the sense of having been dropped there, and expected to stay there, just stay, because that's the way things were, because it was only right that you should appreciate all that had been done for you, the monies voted, set aside, the pouring of the great tar surface, trucks filled with ingredient, spreaders, rollers, men bending over, filling up their lungs, because, well, staying there, playing on the blacktop, it helped to keep things manageable, and because, well, because asphalt was the solution of the



moment, of the day, your day. Amazing, asphalt was amazing. I knew this, could see it.

It's true of course that sometimes when Susan was absent I would go ahead and play the regular games. Four square it would be, usually, though I don't know why, perhaps because it was a little like a tea party, a server, three guests, or like going to a restaurant, one of those restaurants where people are always waiting for a table, parties rotating in, parties rotating out, a line forming at the door. Or sometimes I would play tether ball, the one-on-one of the game attracting my attention, that and the way the ball could be hit hard enough, made to go fast enough, to wind itself taut on the pole, and me standing there looking at it, the tautness, the curves of the wind, the ball letting go, dropping back into place, hanging there.

Or jump rope, I might play that, not by myself, my rope from home, but using the school's long heavy one that you would wrap the bare end of it around your hand when it was your turn to turn, or if you had volunteered to do that, help turn the rope. Or at least I would play jump rope if the rope was not being used for something else, if we girls who wanted to jump had remembered to hurry and check it out, and if one of the teachers was not a turner, if she had not been asked to come outside and play with us, or perhaps volunteered, you know, for some reason of her own.

And songs, there were songs we would sing, or rhymes, there were rhymes, and things to do, feats, when we jumped, toe touches, splits, and we would call out names, the names of people we wanted to come in and jump with us, a special friend, or we could drive people out of town if we decided to, with our rhymes, dancers, mostly it was dancers, Spanish, you know, that we told to leave, by the way we turned the rope, faster, faster, until she would have to miss, couldn't help but miss, be driven out, that little space there, the space the rope would make, touching down, rising up, swinging out, back around, us controlling it, rope turners, dancers, *chanting, standing, dancing, turning, standing, jumping, standing*, her there, a line, you know, girls, taking turns, waiting, watching—and then we would say something, to finish off the rhyme, the all of us, some of us, everyone, I don't know—

get out of town / Spanish dancer get out of town—

that was the first thing we could say, the main ending for the rhyme, but we could add things, you know, if we wanted to, felt the urge, habit, habit taking over, feeling, desire, words rising up, from the gut,

from the throat, mouth to mouth, from the mouth, to the mouth, resuscitation, suffocation, I don't know, past the lips, spilling into us, spilling out, down the throat, up, breathing in, breathing out—

and don't come back / Spanish dancer don't come back—

Or we could change our mind, yes, take it back, if we wanted to, the driving out, whim, habit, second thought, toss the coin, take your pick, study things, look into them, good girls, bad, crude, polite, quick, slow, fast, being tough, going soft, thinking better, thinking ill, the power of it, thrill—

please come back / Spanish dancer please come back—

And messages, there were messages to deliver, all different kinds, and we would do that, deliver them, the messages, as we jumped, turned, stood there, waiting, watching, taking turns, girls, we were girls taking turns—

Postman, Postman, do your duty.  
Send this letter to an American beauty.  
Don't you stop and don't delay.  
Get it to her right away.

She is fair. She is pretty  
She is the girl from the tin can city.

Zoop la la,  
Zoop la la,  
Hey la la,  
Zoop la la,  
Hey la la,  
Zoop, zoop, zoop.

There were times, too, when Susan and I would both play these games, something prompting us, though I don't know what it was, why there were these days when we would gravitate to the heart of the playground. The attraction of crowds, it could have been, I guess, the things that can happen there, in them, be done, or the hustle, the hustle of crowds, energy densely packed, tumult, commotion, the world going round, it could have been that, or a desire, it could have been a desire to see for ourselves (again) what it was the regular



games were like, just in case we'd missed something the last time, not quite gotten it, the fun they could be, or maybe the thing that would happen is that we would just suddenly become frightened by the fact of our own strangeness, by the way we seemed always to be going off somewhere other than the places that were there for us.

Even though we did this, however, played away at the regular games sometimes, and even though we might like playing them sometimes, talking with the other kids, laughing, feeling the body take the game up, the game take the body, we hadn't any of the radical keenness for them that we had for the other games, the games we played at the edge of the blacktop, a little beyond.

Games, these other games, mostly it was just us playing them, or Lindy, sometimes Lindy would be there, the way she had of making the rounds of the playground, turning up in one place, then another, or a new girl, it might be a new girl, when a new family would move in, but only until she could find a place for herself with the other kids, or until she moved away again, to another town.

Or one of the regular girls, it could be one of them, once in a while, once in a while, if her friends weren't at school, I mean, or if there had been a fight. Or a boy, sometimes it was a boy who would wander down.

One of the strange ones, if it was a boy it had to be one of the strange ones, new, old, it didn't matter, so long as there was something wrong with him, fat, skinny, glasses, the eyes magnified, staring out, Mr. Creepy Face, a patch over one lens, astigmatism in the family tree, cooties adhering to his fingertips, no way to get them off, make himself clean, the wrong kind of clothes, hair, smelly, unkempt, always hungry, waiting for lunch time, asking for your leftovers, if you weren't going to eat your sandwich, dessert, could he have it, the tray so full, heaping, the food spilling over, disappearing, the boy asking for more, scanning the hot lunches, the little compartments, the paper sacks, the lunch pails, food there, in them, little packets to be unwrapped, wax paper, foil, passed along, to him, if only he kept at it—was there anything more he could have, anything at all, string beans, yes, okay, he would take those, scrape, scrape them onto his tray, carrots, give them over, a spare serving of cobbler, pear, peach, yes he wanted it, could you, could you just scoop it, scoop it onto his napkin, in case there wasn't time to eat it before the bell rang and everyone had to go outside, the cafeteria shutting down, stragglers, out! nobody left but just the cooks and the student helpers, cart the trash, wash the tables, the janitor there, folding in the tables, bucket, mop, standing ready.

Games, the games we played, these were the games we were always playing, everywhere, all the time, at home, in the neighborhood, the ones we weren't afraid to try out at school, on the playground, at recess, and that released something of us into the air, mirrorings, turns of phrase, story threads, near misses, dead places, lost faces, things kept hidden the rest of the day, the hours spent inside, looking, listening, heads bent over books, pencils flying, good marks piling up, both of us so smart, quick, and frightened, by all that was happening, the welter of instruction, lessons jumping out, doing things.

What to make of it, what to make of it, thinking this, thinking nothing, as you move along, out the door, down the path, to the square, voices bellowing, action, action everywhere; a screen, recess could be a screen, a space, it could be a space, if only you would let it, learn the ropes, slip along, lose yourself, dwindle down, become extra, a speck, do things—

Horses, that was a game we liked to play, the kind where you are very wild and run around a lot, veering off course, veering back, the gallop so fast, and where you snort through your noses and mouths at the same time and paw at the air, rearing up at the appearance of some stupid cowboy, some range rider out to have his way with the territory, his mount so loyal, lost, the ties close, so close, touching the heart, if the horse, if it should die, get shot out from under, the man suddenly become a walker, crawler, the sun hot, the legs giving way, all fours, the hands picking their way along, dragging the hind quarter; squaw women, mashers of acorns, handmaidens, domestic workers, that was another of our games, tough skins, strange innards, bitter, mealy, needing to be scraped out, leached, cooked a certain way, and no pots or pans anywhere, or water, or baskets, or kitchen utensils, blunt instruments, knives, weapons of destruction, but just the holes we would dig in the ground, the bits of broken rock, and the drinking fountain on the other side of the yard, no way to carry the water, though, unless we had thought to use our mouths, hold the water, spit it out, dunk our clothing, hair, wring it, cup our hands, race along, which we never did but just pretended, acorns strewn on the ground around us, brought close enough to gather into small heaps by birds, the wind, stray feet and hands after hours, live oaks growing at our backs, stretching out, disappearing, too far for us to risk going there, and though the trees were another world and would have taken us in without a word, so long as we came alone, the rule of the trees; spotters of fraternal beetles, dim creatures to the upright, crunchy shells, soft undersides, cucumber, *diabrotica*, its chemistry, the



green, phosphorescent, luminous, the way it made us stare, how to take it in, what to make of it, the green, and lady bugs, the familiar red, blunt color.

In spring this would be, the beetles crawling their way around, clumps of grass, weeds sprouting up, larval casings stuck there, on blades, on stems, remnants thinning out, becoming parchment, breaking, wafting, linking up, for me, to my eyes, with the pale shells of hellgrammites dotting river beds in summer, the underside of rocks, things there, soft, hard, people there, wading out, casting eggs, worms, flies, mail order feathers, swatches of hide, trout rising to grizzly, moose, those little hairs, Herb Howard wrapped, whip finished, lacquered, stashed in boxes, stuck to hats, vests, creels.

And the ants, how we would watch them, the small black ones that would file up through cracks in the blacktop, carry off the grains of sugar that we two girls would pinch out from the packets we had brought from home, kept tucked away. Ever so carefully dispensing the sugar, reminding ourselves how easy it would be to bury the ants under granular mounds, all the while observing the sugar's draw, how it roused the ants, got them going, the small feelers, dit, dit, crooking, testing things, lifting, transporting grains down through pinholes into excavations, and no affection there, in the nest, nor anywhere, according to the books, when we would take them up, read, but just a finely wrought system of exchange, matter from the world's larger store, tenders delivering nectar to the brood, the brood secreting a peculiar sweetness, droplets for the tenders, how we would kneel there, lost in the sight of it, winding our way, thoughtless rows, trails, that's what we were, became, Susan and I, one foot, an indeterminate pause, sugar pressing the other foot back, off the blacktop edge, through the dirt and patches of weed into the space where school was not, where games had no rules that could be told in so many words, not to us, not to anyone, the others who would wander down, new girls, those new girls, curious, desperate, at a loss, wondering what to do with themselves, how to dispose of their bodies (Have you ever been one, a new girl, lost really lost, and not, well, you know, reached, reached for anything, anywhere, a person, hand, someone to pull you back, pull you out, pull you up, but just stayed there, in the lost place, to see, to see what a lost place could be, the secrets, the secrets that are held there, in the place, the place that is lost, where you feel, where you feel that you are lost?!), the boys, the strange ones, the Donalds and Eugenes, and the Freddie's, oh, god, but I almost forgot him, Freddie—so long he would say, once a day, at least once a day, to someone, anyone, Susan, me, I'm leaving now, he

would say, after his so long, as if he had a thing about saying goodbye, as if he had to make a note, underscore it, walking, walking, I don't know where Freddie walked, he was so small, hard to see—approaching the blacktop edge, these visitors, standing there, passing by, pausing, a few of them, to ask if they could play, or maybe not wanting to play, nothing like wanting to play, but just wanting to get our attention, deliver news—

Had we heard about Roger, how Roger was chasing Sarah, wanting to kiss her, taste her sweet mouth, how Sarah was crying, hiding in the bathroom, angry, afraid, wanting Roger to leave her alone, disappear, or no, it wasn't Roger, not today, but Daryl, Daryl chasing Madge, Madge chasing Daryl, back and forth, back and forth, and Madge, Madge suddenly getting caught, letting it happen, or catching Daryl, kissing him, kissing him back; had we heard about Carol, Carol and Lisa, how they were fighting again, not speaking, eyes blazing, bodies stiff, Carol going off with Donna, Lisa with Irene; about Rachel, now *there* was something, how Rachel's mother, Diane she was called, how Diane had died the day before, dropped dead in the backyard, planting asters, snapdragons, you know, the flowers, while no one was looking, bed upon bed of them, bursts of color, orange, pink, dragons, the way they are so good for borders, have jaws that are really tubes, the garden books saying so, when we take them up, read, but then I think, so is the throat. A tube, the throat is a tube, beginning where, I'm not sure, ending, where, I'm not sure, the difference, the difference in the function, I guess, natural, acquired, the things the throat does. Myself, I can't keep from swallowing, not but through the ministerings of medication, disease, some foreign object wedged there, paralysis, paralysis will do it, too, though a mere lump is not enough, and flames, I don't swallow those, nor swords, nor shoot them out, either, in this am like the flower, the name, the name a misdirection, beginning where, I'm not sure, ending where, I'm not sure.

Lies, swallowing them, yes, well, it all depends on where you are, who it is you're with, the quality of the hunger, frame of mind, whether a person has eaten recently, been fed, taken to lunch, the cleaners, the cleaners instead, the pockets all empty, the contents all logged, expediently, immediately, let's get the job done, move along, her husband, Diane's husband screwing the secretary for a while now, at the office, her apartment, marrying her, marrying her, not so long after, a new mom for Rachel, a good thing, we say, to have a mother, for a girl to have a mother, though awfully soon, a matter of months, blink the eye, she was dead, blink the eye, he was married, Rachel,



Rachel saying what it was like, when she would come back to school, walk into the room, from the funeral, the wedding, a few words, not too many; had it been Rachel that found her, Rachel's dad, a neighbor—no one seemed to know.

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